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ABSTRACT

The mission of the Rural School and Community Trust is to enlarge student learning and improve community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work. Following a message from the president, a section on the Rural Trust's capacity building program presents the six principles upon which the program is based and reviews major accomplishments of 2001. In addition to sponsoring seven regional and national meetings, the capacity building program began the first of a series of educational renewal zones, in which various educational, community, government, and business interests collaborated to address poor teacher supply and quality and lack of access to technology and other resources. The program launched a national youth council, designed an alternative assessment system based on portfolio assessment, and started a rural arts education initiative. A section on policy discusses why empowering rural people and communities is more important than engaging politicians and reviews major accomplishments of the past year. Three new projects to engage rural people in shaping educational policy were funded, three major research reports were released, and a virtual information and advocacy support network was established to link people concerned with rural school facilities, community design, planning, and finance. Also included are financial statements and lists of funders, board of trustee members, and staff. (TD)

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THE RURAL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TRUST

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ANNUAL REPORT 2001

RC 023240

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The mission of the Rural School and Community Trust is to enlarge student learning and improve community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Message from the President

The Rural School and Community Trust was given a magnificent opportunity through Walter Annenberg's generosity. With those resources, we have nearly completed a grant-making program that built a network of rural schools and community organizations committed to enlarged student learning and improved community life. Now we have an equally challenging and grand opportunity through the generosity of many other donors to continue that mission.

Rural America's children, schools and communities are often overlooked in national discussions, despite the fact that almost 25 percent of children go to school in rural places and small towns. The persistent problems of rural America, such as poverty, isolation—even in our digitized world—and rapid economic and demographic change are too frequently ignored. In the process, the nation at large loses precious opportunities to learn from the small, rural schools that are so well-connected to their communities—places where student learning improves while the lives of local citizens are enriched.

At the Rural Trust, we are committed to supporting young people and their teachers who use their community as a laboratory for learning, and who involve community members as partners in teaching and learning. We are committed to raising the visibility of the lessons that small, place-connected schools can teach us. We are committed to helping rural citizens develop policies that address the unique issues of rural schooling, and we are committed to building knowledgeable, effective, and persistent advocates for rural children, schools and communities.

We hope you will join us in this quest.

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Rachel B. Tompkins, Ed.D.
President, Rural School and Community Trust

Capacity Building

The Rural Trust's Capacity Building Program works with schools, teachers, students and community members to foster and strengthen "place-based" education programs. In Rural Trust schools and communities, this work is based upon the following six principles:

1. The school and community actively collaborate to make the local place a good one in which to learn, work, and live.

2. Students do sustained academic work that draws upon, and contributes to, the place in which they live. They practice new skills and responsibilities, serving as scholars, workers, and citizens in their community.

3. Schools mirror the democratic values they seek to instill, arranging their resources so that every child is known well and every child's participation, regardless of ability, is needed and wanted.

4. Decision-making about the education of the community's children is shared, informed by expertise both inside and outside the school.

5. All participants—teachers, students, and community members—expect excellent effort from each other and review their joint progress regularly and thoughtfully. Multiple measures and public input enlarge assessments of student performance.

6. The school and community support students, their teachers, and their adult mentors in these new roles.

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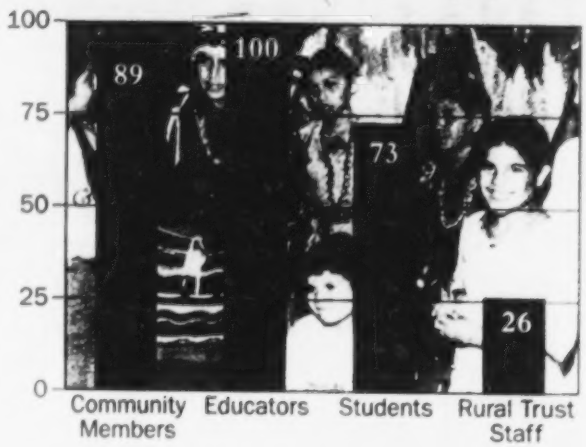
The Year's Major Accomplishments

By focusing on a broad set of issues affecting rural education, including teacher education, youth voice and involvement, and alternative assessment methods for place-based education, the Rural Trust's Capacity Building Program made strides this year to introduce the Rural Trust to the nation and expand place-based curriculum across regions.

In order to meet our goals of deepening and broadening the work of place-based education, introducing new programs and people to the Rural Trust, improving and sustaining the capacity of rural communities/schools, and building networks of support for rural schools and communities, the Capacity Building Program sponsored regional and national meetings aimed at sharing and discussing the future of rural education. At four regional meetings (Appalachia, Northwest, Southwest and Upper Midwest), 650 participants from 22 states attended and shared their work. The national meetings, including the Student Extravaganza, biennial Rendezvous, and annual Stewardship Institute, attracted more than 700 students, educators and community members from 37 states.

Rendezvous Attendance, *July 2000*



Educational Renewal Zones

The Capacity Building Program began a pilot program for Educational Renewal Zones (ERZ) in Missouri this year; the Rural Trust plans on expanding to other states in the coming years. ERZ is a highly focused, well-coordinated collaboration among schools, communities, higher education institutions, and statewide

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organizations to address the complex problems facing rural schools and communities as result of poor teacher supply and quality and lack of access to technology and other resources.

In Missouri, we formed a partnership with three higher education institutions, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, a technical college, the Coordinating Council of Higher Education, and a number of statewide technical support organizations, as well as a panel of six rural superintendents to advise in the process. Our goals include restructuring the teacher and technology coordinator recruitment, training, and retention efforts of rural communities; developing relationships among institutions, schools and communities to integrate the use of appropriate technology in rural schools; and building and sustaining strong community support for schools.

Youth Council

We launched a National Youth Council this year, composed of 18 youth aged 14-19 representing 14 states. Concentrating on the areas of place-based education and youth/adult partnerships, the group developed a strategic plan for its work over the next couple of years. The group set goals for teacher training and partnering, marketing and communications, developing and presenting speeches, youth/adult partnership training and assessment, and student advocacy.

Portfolio Design/Alternative Assessment

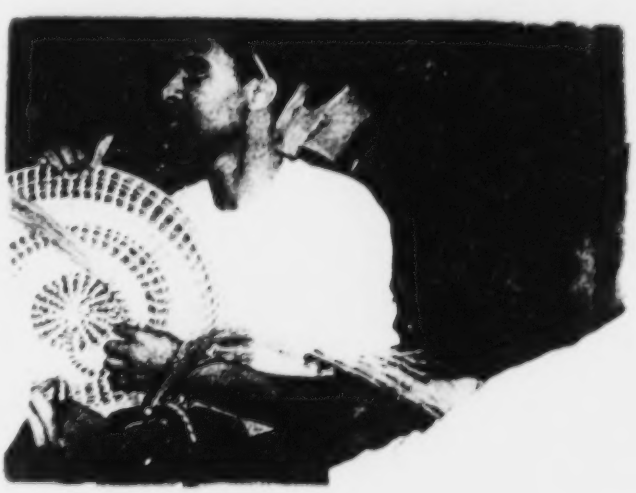
This year we designed a comprehensive assessment and support system for place-based school and community work. At the heart of the system is a portfolio-based assessment process, created in part through the work of nine design teams from Rural Trust network sites around the country. Facilitated by staff from the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the teams worked to create an online

and print workbook that can be used by schools and communities to document, assess, share, and, most of all, strengthen their place-based work; make a persuasive case for their efforts to important audiences, both close and distant; and form the basis for requesting waivers from the often narrow and limiting assessment practices commonly accompanying current accountability models in public education.

The process focuses on student learning, community learning, deepening and broadening the work, and youth/adult partnerships. The assessment process will be used by a minimum of 35–50 schools and communities in the coming year.

Rural Arts Education Initiative

With a planning grant from the J. Paul Getty Trust, the Rural Trust embarked upon a rural arts education initiative this year. Still in its planning stages, the Rural Trust aims to help rural schools and communities redress the lack of arts learning in their schools, rediscover their artistic roots and reclaim their place in American art by developing a comprehensive arts program for the nation's rural schoolchildren. At seven regional planning meetings, community members, students and educators shared their dreams for a rural arts education initiative. Forty-seven regional representatives and arts education experts attended the national planning meeting, and there identified "best practices" from around the country, consolidated ideas from regional meetings and started to create a plan. The plan will ultimately form a strong framework of strategies to address the multiple and unique barriers to the use and appreciation of arts in rural schools.



POLICY

The Rural Trust's Policy Program aims to help rural people be effective and responsible participants in important policy issues affecting schools and communities. The policy program's efforts are based on the following premises:

1. We are committed to public education rooted in public values. Therefore, our battle is not for the hearts and minds of elected officials, but for the hearts and minds of the general public. Our engagement is with people more than with politicians.

2. The active engagement and empowerment of rural people in policy-making is more important in the long run than are specific changes in policy in the short run. Our objectives are not primarily legislative, although legislative objectives sometimes can focus the energy of people in creative and useful ways.

3. We are especially interested in engaging those traditionally removed from policy-making because of their poverty, color, place of residence, education level, or political skill.

4. Our work must bring rural people into the process of education policy-making on their own terms, and not merely as carte blanche "supporters" of public schools. Most of our work must originate in communities and among citizens rather than in schools and among professionals. It is especially important that it include the whole body politic, as well as professional educators and parents. This commitment to involving the whole rural public is crucial because:
   - That is where the potential political power lies. The rural public is a demographic minority almost everywhere in the nation, and united action is needed to make a difference.
   - Focusing on professional educators and parents tends to divide schools from communities, and "taxpayers" from "tax users." When education is reduced to "self interest" politics, rural areas are the first to lose.

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- The community is where both school reform and policy reform ultimately must be rooted. No change—in policy or practice—will be effective or last long if it is not understood and embraced by an informed and committed public.
- Youth are not passive beneficiaries of policy work, but are engaged in it. With appropriate caution that youth not be "used" by adults for political purposes, we want to engage students in this work in as many ways as we can.

The Year's Major Accomplishments

With rural school consolidation on the rise and an increase in disregarded, dilapidated school facilities among the numerous issues rural schools face, the Rural Trust's Policy Program worked this year in 24 leading rural states to understand the complex issues affecting rural schools and communities; to inform the public debate over rural education policy; and to help rural communities act on education policy issues affecting them.

By concentrating on grassroots efforts to mobilize rural citizens, funding and conducting research on the condition of rural education across the nation, and hosting discussions on such issues as educational facilities improvement, the Policy Program has helped to elevate the position of rural education in the minds of rural citizens, policymakers and educators.

Improved Grassroots Organizing

Through 13 local and statewide partner organizations, the Rural Trust Policy Program supported efforts to engage rural people in shaping education policy that will improve their schools and communities. Three new projects were funded this year: Vermont Children's Forum (to increase rural Vermonters' participation in

that state's continuing controversy over equal educational opportunity), Arkansas Public Policy Panel (to launch a long-term effort to engage rural Arkansans, especially in the Delta region, in a wide range of education policy issues), and Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children (a coalition of school districts trying to establish funding equity for the most remote schools serving mostly Alaska Native populations).

The work of our partner organizations improved in depth and increased in scope over the last year. We helped our partners cultivate networks of rural activists at the local level, encourage more state level participation, and increase the participation of students in policy issues.

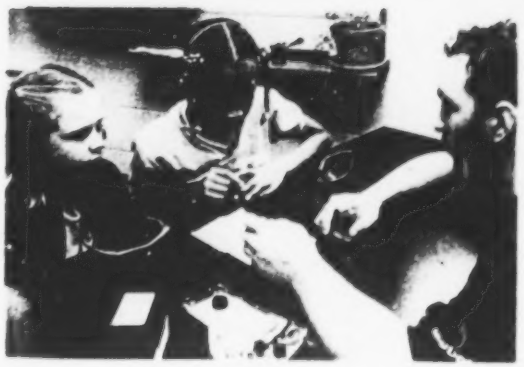
Rural Education Research

The Policy Program released *Why Rural Matters: The Need for Every State to Take Action on Rural Education* in August 2000, a state-by-state gauge of the condition of rural education in the 50 states. It is believed to be the first attempt to describe the importance of rural education in each state, and to suggest the urgency with which policymakers should address the needs of rural schools and communities. The media coverage of *Why Rural Matters* included 437 newspaper stories in 45 states, reaching a combined circula-

STUDENT ACTIVISM

In Ohio, Rural Action, Inc. used a high-profile state Supreme Court case *(DeRolph)* that sought equitable funding for rural Ohio schools as a backdrop for developing curriculum resources and commencing student organizing. They created *The DeRolph Case: A Handbook on the School Funding Debate* that was used in some schools as a part of the social studies curriculum. As a result, more than 900 students rallied on the statehouse lawn in May and met with legislators to present them with an "invoice" for the funds they claim the state owes to their struggling schools. Ohio Rural Action plans to build upon the success of this process next year by working with superintendents in other counties to encourage student organizing.

tion of more than 25 million readers. Radio actualities were picked up by 242 radio stations and 12 statewide radio networks; Rural Trust staff members completed approximately 75 radio interviews for stations and networks in 20 states. Television news stories aired on 18 stations in nine states.



In February 2001, we released *A Reasonably Equal Share: Educational Equity in Vermont*, our first research project targeted to the activist needs of a state partner. The report found that Vermont's Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1997 (Act 60) has significantly improved educational equity in Vermont, by reducing both tax and spending inequities across the state while preserving local control. Moreover, the report found that while test scores improved everywhere in the state, they improved most in the state's poorest towns. The document played an important part in the state Legislature's debate on whether to soften the state's commitment to equal educational opportunity.

We also commissioned an investigative report on rural education research, *Where Has All the "Rural" Gone? Rural Education Research and Current Federal Reform*, which found a significant lack of federal support for research on rural education. We continued to support the rural education research of independent scholars.

Tools and Services

We established a School Facilities Network, a virtual information and advocacy support network linking people concerned with rural school facilities, community design, planning, and finance. The network already involves more than 120 people from 38 states. An e-mail-based discussion list is the primary vehicle for information sharing, and it is starting to reach the critical mass necessary to have consistent, high quality exchanges. People can easily sign up and become a part of the discussion by visiting www.ruraledu.org/facilities.html.

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FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Rural School and Community Trust
June 30, 2001 and 2000

Statements of Financial Position (Summarized)

ASSETS	2001	2000
Total Current Assets	12,333,925	21,633,179
Furniture and Equipment, net	4,279	10,843
TOTAL ASSETS	12,338,204	21,644,022
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Total Current Liabilities	3,058,118	4,097,159
Total Long-term Liabilities	1,500,000	3,031,010
Total Liabilities	4,558,118	7,128,169
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	506,876	(1,064,448)
Temporarily Restricted	7,273,210	15,580,301
Total Net Assets	7,780,086	14,515,853
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	12,338,204	21,644,022

Statements of Activities (Summarized)

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	2001	2000
Contributions	160,499	25,148,695
Investment Income	152,188	69,044
Program Income	21,390	—
Total Support and Revenue	334,077	25,217,739
EXPENSES		
Program Services	6,084,733	11,003,845
General and Administrative Expenses	582,478	559,595
Fundraising Expenses	402,633	447,050
Total Expenses	7,069,844	12,010,490
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	(6,735,767)	13,207,249

Note: Complete financial statements available upon request.

Funders

As in previous years, the majority of the Rural Trust's 2000-01 operating budget came from a portion of the seven-year challenge grant from the Annenberg Foundation. The final installments of multi-year grants under the Annenberg funding will be paid to recipients during the 2001-02 fiscal year. Annenberg support will conclude on June 30, 2002.

As the challenge grant from the Annenberg Foundation comes to a close, the Rural Trust is making the transition from a grant-making organization to a national nonprofit organization engaged in training, research and advocacy and supported by a diverse list of individual, corporate, and foundation donors.

The transition to being a permanent, publicly-supported nonprofit has been supported by the extraordinary vision and leadership of our funders that have supported the work of the Rural Trust. They set a strong example of the type of support needed to maintain the Trust as a viable force. We expect to add many individuals and corporations, both national and regional, to the distinguished list that appears below. In addition, the Rural Trust is actively seeking restricted gifts to support its Capacity Building and Policy programs.

We thank all who have helped make this organization what it is today.

Foundations

The Annenberg Foundation
AT&T Foundation
The Brown Foundation, Inc.
The Ford Foundation
The J. Paul Getty Trust
The Lyndhurst Foundation

Individuals

Raymond Barnhardt
Julie Bartsch
Arthur Campbell
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Agnes Gund
John M. Hills
Ginny Jaramillo
Linda B. Martin
Jack Murrah
Maconda O'Connor
Sylvia and John Parker
Gary and Barbara Poore
Elaine Salinas
Marty Strange
Rachel B. Tompkins
Kathy Westra
John D. Zeglis
Carol Zippert

The Rural Trust maintains a small national office in Washington, DC, housing the organization's six-person executive, finance, development, communications and administrative support staff. Other staff members work from their home communities in Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin to advance the Rural Trust's policy and capacity building work.

The Rural Trust publishes two newsletters: the bimonthly *Rural Roots*, with place-based education news and resources for teachers, students and community members; and the monthly *Rural Policy Matters*, with policy-related news for rural education activists. Both newsletters are available without charge, in either printed or electronic format. Readership over the past year has grown to nearly 5,000 for both publications.

The Rural Trust also maintains a website (www.ruraledu.org) with news of place-based education programs throughout the U.S., a library of publications, topical discussion forums on issues such as school facilities and alternative assessment, and links to other education-related sites and resources. With the publication of special reports on rural education, and increased awareness of the Rural Trust's work, visits to the website have increased dramatically during the past year.

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